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## **China's SCO Policy in the Regional Security Architecture**

from “Asia-Pacific Security Architecture:  
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## About This Article

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# CHINA'S SCO POLICY IN THE REGIONAL SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

*Masayuki Masuda*

## INTRODUCTION

**A**s many analysts and scholars have pointed out in recent years, China's new security concept employs a cooperative and comprehensive approach, and has become less antagonistic than before to military alliance with regard to developing and implementing concrete policies.<sup>1</sup> In this context, considerable attention has been given to China's involvement in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), its closer relations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) through ASEAN +1 (China) and ASEAN +3 (Japan, China, and South Korea), and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF).<sup>2</sup> Such organizations are concrete examples of policy devel-

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<sup>1</sup> David Shambaugh, "China Engages Asia: Reshaping the Regional Order," *International Security*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (2004/2005), p.91.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Akio Takahara, "Chugoku no shin anzen hoshō kan to chiiki seisaku (China's new security concept and its regional policy)" Akio Igarashi and Akio Takahara eds., *Higashi ajia anzen hoshō no shin tenkai* (New development of security in East Asia), (Tokyo: Akashishoten, 2005); Kazuko Mori, "Chugoku no ajia chiiki gaiko (China's diplomacy in Asia)" Akio Watanabe ed., *Ajia taiheiyō rentai koso* (25 years after Ohira's initiative for Asia-Pacific Cooperation), (Tokyo: NTT shuppan, 2005); Kazuko Mori, "Chugoku no ajia chiki gaiko: shanghai kyoryoku kiko wo megutte (China's

opments based on China's new security concept, which is the ideological basis for Chinese leadership within a foreign policy towards regions. Previous studies have focused on the significance of the regional approach of Chinese diplomacy, however, and little consideration has been given to the possibility of a mutual relationship emerging with other regional security mechanisms, including with the United States and its allies.

In part, this lack of interest is due to the fact that the basic design of China's new security concept—providing a rebuttal or counterpoint to the military alliance strategy of the United States—continues to play a prominent role in China's diplomatic and security policies. The China's defense white paper *China's National Defense in 2008*, for example, despite promising to encourage conducting security dialogues and cooperation with other countries based upon the new security concept, also makes it clear that China will continue to “oppose the enlargement of military alliances.”<sup>3</sup> Further evidence for the persistence of this underlying attitude came at the SCO leaders' summit in July 2005, when the leaders made a joint declaration calling for a clear timetable for withdrawal of US-led anti-terrorist forces from Central Asia. These circumstances suggest that there is little room in China's design of regional security cooperation for the inclusion of US alliances or other security cooperation arrangements lead by the United States. In addition, although many Chinese scholars have cited the emergence of non-

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diplomacy in Asia: focus on the Shanghai Cooperation Organization),” Akio Watanabe, ed., *Ajia taiheiyo to aratashii chūki shugi no tenkai* (Shaping the future: Asia Pacific in the 21st century), (Tokyo: Chikura shobo, 2010); Chien-Peng Chung, “China's Roles in the SCO and the ARF: Implications for the Asia-Pacific Region,” Michael H. H. Hsiao and Cheng-yi Lin eds., *The Rise of China: Beijing's Strategies and Implications for the Asia-Pacific*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, *China's National Defense in 2008*, (January 2009).

traditional security threats as one reason for setting high value on regional security cooperation, they continue at the same time to emphasize that traditional military alliances cannot deal effectively with non-traditional security threats.<sup>4</sup> For China, in other words, the significance of regional cooperation and multilateral security mechanisms stems largely from the opportunity such arrangements provide to form a countermeasure to alliance relationships and US-led security cooperation.

But even if China remains critical of US alliances and US-led security mechanisms, and continues to push regional security cooperation based on its new security concept, there is little prospect that such regional cooperation will ever replace alliances and US-led security mechanisms. Providing a critical countermeasure to American alliances may form the fundamental basis of China's foreign and security policy design, in other words—but this is not a position that can be easily implemented as concrete policy. A research project carried out by scholars at the Institute of Strategic Studies at the National Defense University of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), for example, points out that multilateral and bilateral mechanisms coexist in parallel throughout the region, and anticipates that bilateral arrangements such as American alliances with Japan and South Korea will continue to exist alongside multilateral mechanisms for many years to come.<sup>5</sup> If such is the case, boosting cooperative relationships and improving amicability with these mechanisms is a real policy issue for Chinese diplomacy, and forming a theoretical framework for them is an essential task. The same pro-

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<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Guo Rui, "Guoji tixi zhuanxing yu dongbeiyi duobian zhidu anpai gouxiang (Transformation of the international system and a vision of multilateral arrangements in northeast Asia)," *Tongji daxue xuebao: Shehui kexue ban* (Journal of Tongji University: Social science), Vol. 19, No. 6 (December 2008), pp. 86-92.

<sup>5</sup> Yang Yi ed., *Zhongguo guojia anquan zhanlue gouxiang* (A vision of China's national security strategy), (Beijing: Shishi chubanshe, 2009), p. 222.

ject concludes that ensuring that such multilateral mechanisms accord with US security interests will be vital to the security and stability of the region in the years to come.

Based on this understanding, this paper attempts to clarify the present state of China's regional security design by considering concrete policy developments. It suggests points of common interest between China's proposals for regional security cooperation and US alliances and security cooperation led by the United States, which many in the past had viewed as mutually opposed. For the most part, my examination focuses on the SCO, a regional organization of which China was a founding member and in which it continues to play a leading role.

## **1. CHINA'S DESIGN FOR REGIONAL SECURITY COOPERATION**

### *(1) Regional Cooperation in "Harmonious World"*

An indication of the type of international order that China would like to see came in a speech given by President Hu Jintao in September 2005 at a meeting of heads of government commemorating the 60th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations (UN). One characteristic of the "harmonious world" argument was an emphasis on multilateral diplomacy, including joint efforts to deal with any security threat. The Chinese leadership had recognized the importance of multilateralism and multilateral diplomacy since the second half of the 1990s, but the context for this was geopolitical. At an internal meeting of the PLA in October 2001, Jiang Zemin gave a speech as chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC) in which he underlined the need to build an advantageous strategic position in the international climate following 9/11 and American military action in Afghanistan, focusing on three diplomatic arenas: (a) relations with the major powers; (b) regional rela-

tions; (c) multilateral diplomacy.<sup>6</sup> Obviously, the geopolitical context continues play a part in Chinese diplomacy. But the “harmonious world” argument was part of a new Chinese diplomatic vision of “taking neighbors as friends and partners (*yulinweishan yilinweiban*)” that was first unveiled at the 16th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in November 2002, and represented the development of a multilateral diplomacy in the neighboring region based on this view. An editorial in the *People’s Daily* (*Renmin ribao*) of 11th December 2006, commented on China’s regional diplomacy in the following terms: “China’s policy of ‘taking neighbors as friends and partners’ constitutes a crucial impetus for the building of a harmonious world. China’s efforts in this regard must necessarily begin with our relations with neighboring countries. In pursuing its diplomatic policy in the region, China will place the highest importance on the diplomatic ideals of peace, a preventative military strategy, and cooperation in security policy, recognizing the autonomy of each country and respecting regional diversity in order to successfully build a peaceful and stable international security environment marked by friendly regional relations, mutual benefit, equality, and cooperation.”<sup>7</sup>

Based on this perspective, President Hu Jintao made a call for a “harmonious periphery” at a SCO leaders’ summit held in Shanghai in June 2006, and proposed four measures to bring this about.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Jiang Zemin, “Yingzao youli zhanlue taishi, zengqiang guojia zhanlue nengli (construct a favorable strategic condition, strengthen national strategic capacity)” (October 31, 2001), Jiang Zemin, *Jiangzemin wensxuan* (selected works of Jiang Zemin), Vol. 3, (Beijing, Renmin chubanshe, 2006), pp. 353-365.

<sup>7</sup> Guo Jiping, “Haolinju haopengyou haohuoban (good neighbors, good friends, good partners),” *Renmin ribao* (people’s daily), December 11, 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Hu Jintao, “Gongchuang shanghai hezuo zuzhi geng jia meihao de mingtian (create a brighter tomorrow for the SCO together),” (June 15, 2006), *Renmin ribao*, June 16, 2006.

His proposals were: signing a treaty on long-term good-neighborness, friendship and cooperation to solidify amicable relations between SCO member states; stronger working-level partnerships for comprehensive development; human and cultural exchanges to build stronger social foundations; and, finally, a call for “openness and cooperation for the purpose of world peace,” with the SCO as a venue for “broad-based international cooperation and proactive international exchange.” The proposals suggest that China is not interested in regional cooperation merely from the perspective of geopolitical balancing, but is now seeking stronger cooperation from a regionalist perspective. China apparently arrived at the view that closer functional cooperation was essential in a number of fields in order for the various countries of the region to benefit from regional mechanisms, and has moved to put this insight into practice as policy. In addition to the annual Heads of State and Heads of Government Councils, there are twelve mechanisms in place for regular ministerial-level meetings. Additionally, two permanent bodies were established in 2004: the Secretariat in Beijing, and the Regional Counter-Terrorism Structure in Tashkent. To further encourage functional cooperation within this framework, working groups have been established in a number of specific areas, including e-commerce (chaired by China), customs (Russia), quality and inspection (Kazakhstan), investment promotion (Tajikistan), and development of cross-border potential (Uzbekistan), with each SCO member state chairing a group and taking responsibility for planning cooperation in the relevant field.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Gong Xinshu and Liu Qingyan, “Shanghai hexuo zuzhi kuangxia xia jingji hezuo zhiyue yinsu ji yuanyin fenxi (economic cooperation constraints factors analysis within the framework of the shanghai cooperation organization),” *Chongqing gongshang daxue xuebao: shehui kexue ban* (journal of Chongqing technology and business university: social science), Vol. 26, No. 3 (June 2009), p. 24.



## *(2) The Architecture over the Shanghai Cooperation Organization*

If China and its partners are serious about making real progress on regional cooperation in Central Asia, the SCO will be just one of the policy measures used to bring it about. As Xu Tongkai, director general of the Department of European Affairs in the Chinese Ministry of Commerce, has pointed out: “Five of the SCO member states also belong to the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC), and all six take part in regional economic cooperation mechanisms such as the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Program under the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP)’s plans for a new Eurasian land-bridge international cooperation mechanism.”<sup>10</sup> The reality is that there is particularly high demand for regional economic cooperation, especially in investment and technology, which is another reason why the SCO’s principle of openness is being emphasized. Accordingly, Xu proposed strengthening collaboration between the SCO and such international financial bodies as the EurAsEC, the ADB, and the UNDP, using the experience, funding, and technological advantage of these bodies to create beneficial conditions for economic cooperation in the region.

In the field of security, too, there are signs of attempts to position the SCO within an overall structure of the region. SCO Deputy Secretary General Vladimir Zakharov has said, “We will push forward with a wide variety of dialogue, exchanges, and cooperation

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<sup>10</sup> Director General of the Department of European Affairs in the Chinese Ministry of Commerce Xu Tongkai’s Speech at the international symposium on Trade Policy of China and Central Asian countries, and regional economic cooperation, April 27, 2006. Available at [http://www.sco-ec.gov.cn/crweb/scoc/info/ArticleZt.jsp?a\\_no=28752&col\\_no=203](http://www.sco-ec.gov.cn/crweb/scoc/info/ArticleZt.jsp?a_no=28752&col_no=203) (accessed December 6, 2010).

both with individual countries and with international bodies, aiming to achieve peace, security, and stability in the region based on the principles of equality and mutual consultation.”<sup>11</sup> Zakharov pointed out that dialogue was ongoing based on the memorandum of understanding with the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in September 2007, and that the SCO maintains regular contacts with both the European Union (EU) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Granted, the process of building relationships between the SCO and other international and regional bodies is still in its infancy, remaining at the preliminary stage of contacts and dialogues. Given the security situation surrounding the SCO, however, building external relations will be an important part of improving the organization’s problem-solving ability.

Of particular interest from this perspective is an essay by Wang Jian, associate professor at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS), who examines issues confronting the SCO from the viewpoint of regional public goods.<sup>12</sup> According to Wang, the achievements of regional policy represent an important part of such public goods. These include regional peace and security, regional systems to manage and control infectious diseases, and regional financial stability. The inadequate provision of such public goods is a major problem in the Central Asia region, and Wang points out that the SCO instead faces large numbers of what he calls “regional public bads.” He suggests that non-exclusive and non-rivalrous “club goods,” which spread their benefits easily over a limited re-

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<sup>11</sup> *Shanghai hexuo zuzhi ziliao huibian* (compilation of materials and document of shanghai cooperation organization), Vol. 4 (Center of SCO Studies, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences), p.14.

<sup>12</sup> Wang Jian, “Shanghai hexuo zuzho de weilai fazhan lujing xuanze: cong diqu gonggong chanpin de shijiao (future development path selection of shanghai cooperation organization: from the regional public goods perspective),” *Shehu kexue* (journal of social sciences), No. 8 (2007), pp. 67-72.

gion, may be one way of overcoming these “public bads” and providing public goods. Building on this, Wang suggests that the SCO needs to improve the provision of regional public goods in areas such as security cooperation against terrorism, anti-drug networks, energy cooperation, protection of water resources, and stability of ecosystems, by strengthening regional cooperation among member states. One of the interesting aspects of the discourse is its awareness, albeit limited, of the question of how to guarantee the nonexclusivity of the SCO toward countries and actors outside the region. The paper stresses the importance of considering national, regional, and international policy agendas together “in a unified way” when formulating policies for effective provision of regional public goods. As part of this process, Wang suggests the possibility of granting certain countries the status of “observers or cooperation partners,” according to the issues involved. Given that the SCO is still in the capacity-building stage in terms of providing public goods, however, Wang believes that allowing actors from outside the region to participate from an early stage would lead to a “dispersion of resources,” and therefore argues that external actors should be allowed to participate in the capacity-building process on a selective basis.

Formulating an appropriate format for collaboration with the Russian-led CSTO, which has the ability to act instantly and with which a memorandum was exchanged in September 2007, is therefore an important policy issue. China has been circumspect and noncommittal in terms of the relationship between the CSTO and the SCO. For example, associate professor Li Shuyin at the Department of World Military Studies in the PLA Academy of Military Sciences, remains cautious on the subject of relations between the two organizations, despite the exchange of a memorandum between them. “The SCO is not the only option that countries in Central Asia have in terms of security cooperation,” Li says. “This is bound to have a certain influence on the SCO’s security cooperation ef-

forts.” Li points to the existence of multiple military cooperation mechanisms, including the CSTO, as an obstacle on future development of the SCO.<sup>13</sup> The CSTO, however, has been quite proactive in pushing forward collaboration with the SCO, such as proposing joint military exercises during the negotiation phase.<sup>14</sup> But China has remained wary of military cooperation and drills between the CSTO and the SCO. Senior lieutenant Qi Guowei, director of the foreign affairs office of China’s Central Military Commission, has emphasized that unlike the CSTO, the SCO is not an alliance with military characteristics, and has stressed that no plans exist for military exercises between the two organizations.<sup>15</sup> Reflecting this attitude on the part of the Chinese, the September 2007 memorandum between the SCO and the CSTO states that the two organizations will cooperate “according to the capabilities of each organization.” According to the agreement, the two sides will cooperate in the following fields: (a) Support for regional and international safety and stability; (b) Counter-terrorism; (c) Narcotics smuggling; (d) Illegal weapons trading; (e) Cross-border organized crime; and (f) Any other areas of shared concern.<sup>16</sup> Cooperation is thus limited to non-traditional security issues. This suggests that in its relations with CSTO and other regional organizations, China is looking not for military but political collaboration.

Another point to bear in mind regarding Chinese diplomatic principles is that China’s primary aim is not to strengthen its rela-

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<sup>13</sup> Li Shuyin, “Shanghai hezuo zuzhi de anquan hezuo (security cooperation in the SCO),” Xing Guangcheng ed., *Shanghai hezuo zuzhi fazhan baogao 2009* (annual report on the shanghai cooperation organization: 2009), (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2009), p. 86.

<sup>14</sup> “CSTO, SCO to Sign Cooperation Protocol,” *ITAR-TASS*, July 31, 2007.

<sup>15</sup> “Shanghe wuyi ji’an tiaoyueguo yanxi (SCO will not have military exercises)” *Mingbao*, August 29, 2007.

<sup>16</sup> *Shanghai hezuo zuzhi ziliao huibian*, Vol. 4, p. 1.

tions with regional bodies directly, but to develop its relations with regional bodies, using the United Nations as an intermediary. In January 2010, China's permanent representative to the United Nations Zhang Yesui called a special meeting as UN Security Council Chairman. The subject of the meeting was "cooperation between the UN and regional and sub-regional organizations in maintaining international peace and security." In addition to confirming the primary role of the United Nations in supporting international peace and security, the purpose of the meeting was to strengthen cooperation and collaboration between the United Nations and regional organizations and to encourage regional organizations to use their advantages more effectively.<sup>17</sup> At the end of the meeting, Zhang spoke in his capacity as a representative of the Chinese government, stressing the importance of the following four points: (a) The principles of the Charter of the United Nations need to be adhered to; (b) The Security Council should encourage and create conditions and an environment that are favorable for the regional organizations' efforts to resolve regional disputes peacefully through preventive diplomacy, conciliation, and consultation; (c) The United Nations and regional organizations need to strengthen coordination and form synergy; and (d) One of the top priorities of the cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations is to assist regional and sub-regional organizations in capacity building.<sup>18</sup> For China, therefore, strengthening cooperative relations with the United Nations is a fundamental premise of building relations between regional organizations. China demands a primary leadership role for the United Nations—from conflict resolution to capacity building support.

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<sup>17</sup> "Zhang Yesui jieshao benyue anlihui zhuyao gongzuo (Zhang Yesui introduces a main work of UNSC this month)," *Zhongguo xinwenshe* (China news), January 5, 2010.

<sup>18</sup> S/PV.6257, January 13, 2010, p. 39.

## 2. THE SCO IN SEARCH FOR EXTERNAL RELATIONS

### *(1) Enlargement of the SCO: Observer Status*

As discussed above, the SCO is developing cooperative relationships with several international organizations. This process has developed in accordance with the SCO Charter passed in June 2002, which sets out regulations for establishing relationships of cooperation and dialogue with countries or organizations outside the SCO.<sup>19</sup> Article 1 of the Charter makes it clear that one of the goals and tasks of the SCO is to “maintain and develop relations with other states and international organizations,” while Article 14 says that the organization “may grant the status of a dialogue partner or observer” to a state or international organization in order to carry out dialogue and cooperation. However, the charter did not lay down concrete rules and procedures for granting such status, leaving this to be decided by subsequent special agreements between member states. At a meeting of foreign ministers of SCO states in November 2002, an agreement was reached on a temporary plan for external relations.<sup>20</sup> A subsequent agreement allowed for the invitation of nonmember states and international organizations to participate in SCO foreign ministerial summits and other meetings. There were no indications of a comprehensive plan for the SCO’s overall foreign relations, however. One reason was that a consensus had still not been reached among member states regarding the geographical range of the SCO. A joint communiqué issued at the SCO

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<sup>19</sup> “Charter of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.” Available at <http://www.sectsc.org/EN/show.asp?id=69> (accessed December 7, 2010).

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.sectsc.org/CN/show.asp?id=105> (accessed on December 6, 2010).

foreign ministers' meeting in September 2003 revealed that an agreement had been reached to "push forward with cooperation among the relevant states and organizations," but that debate was still continuing as far as the geographic range of such arrangements was concerned.<sup>21</sup> A joint communiqué issued at the Heads of State meeting at the end of the same month expressed the leaders' intentions to "push ahead with dialogue and cooperation of all kinds in the economic area."<sup>22</sup> The SCO's deliberation process had thus led to a shared policy structure on foreign affairs both in the areas of security and the economy, but no consensus was possible on the question of which states and international organizations should be admitted as observers or dialogue partners, or the geographical extent of the organization.

In June 2004, the Regulations on Observer Status at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization were introduced, making it possible for observer nations to take part in heads of state and heads of government summits.<sup>23</sup> Article 1 of the regulations stipulates: "A state or an organization, wishing to receive observer status at the SCO, proceeding from respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and equal rights of the member states, recognition of the main objectives, principles, and actions of the organization, for-

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<sup>21</sup> "Shanghai hezuo zuzhi waijiao buzhang fei lixing huiyi lianhe gongbao (joint communiqué of the SCO foreign ministers' meeting)" September 5, 2003.

<sup>22</sup> "Shanghai hezuo zuzhi chengyuanguo zongli huiwu lianhe gongbao (joint communiqué of meeting of the prime ministers of the SCO member states)," Waijiaobu Ouyasi (Department of European-Central Asian Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs) ed., *Shanghai hezuo zuzhi wenxuan xuanbian* (compilation of selected document of shanghai cooperation organization), (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 2006), p. 315.

<sup>23</sup> "The Regulations on Observer Status at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation." Available at <http://www.sectSCO.org/EN/show.asp?id=65> (accessed on December 7, 2010).

wards a letter, signed by a head of state or a head of organization respectively, through the secretary general to the Council of Heads of SCO Member States.” This simply recites the international norms for procedures of this kind, and provides no clear rulings on the necessary qualifications for applying for observer status.

This lack of clear guidelines regarding application requirements for the granting of observer status later gave rise to foreign relations instability between SCO and the rest of the world. The first country to which the SCO granted observer status was Mongolia, in 2004, followed by Pakistan, Iran, and India, all in 2005.<sup>24</sup> According to Chinese President Hu Jintao, the participation in the SCO of Mongolia, Pakistan, Iran, and India as observers further demonstrated to the international community the principle of openness of the SCO as well as its cooperative stance in participating in international and regional affairs.<sup>25</sup> Many experts and analysts in China also tended to regard the granting of observer status to these countries as marking the “expansion of the SCO.” The *Study Times* (*Xuexi shibao*), for example, the organ of the Party School of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, published an article (dated June 20, 2005) titled “Evaluating the Expansion of the SCO,” which claimed that the SCO “already has ten members” and that “with this most recent expansion, the area covered by the organization now stretches to incorporate the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent, making it a huge organization capable of squaring up to NATO from afar.”<sup>26</sup>

This expansion through the granting of observer status, “without regard for geographical range” increased American con-

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<sup>24</sup> “Shanghai Cooperation Organization Approves Iran, Pakistan, India Observer Status,” *IRNA*, July 5, 2005.

<sup>25</sup> “Full Text of Chinese President Hu Jintao’s Speech at the SCO Astana Summit,” (July 5, 2005), *Xinbua*, July 6, 2006.

<sup>26</sup> Zhang Jianjing, “Ping shanghai hezuo zuzhi kuorong (evaluating the expansion of the SCO),” *Xuexi shibao* (study times), June 20, 2005.



cerns about the SCO, especially in the post-9/11 context. The US government had long designated countries such as North Korea and Iran as “sponsors of terrorism,” but following 9/11, President George W. Bush described North Korea and Iran as belonging to an “axis of evil.” Iran was granted SCO observer status, while the United States’ own application for the same status was turned down. Additionally, the SCO leaders’ summit in 2005 issued a joint declaration calling on the countries of anti-terrorist coalition in Afghanistan to set final deadlines for the temporary use of the infrastructure facilities and for the presence of military contingents on the territories of the member countries of the SCO.<sup>27</sup> These factors led to the SCO’s international image as a venue for airing grievances against the United States. This made the United States, in particular, suspicious about the form the SCO was taking. At an Asian Security Summit held on the eve of the SCO leaders’ summit in 2006, US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld expressed his surprise at Iran’s participation in the SCO, describing it as “a leading terrorist nation.”<sup>28</sup>

## *(2) Concept Building for Future Relations with the United States: Dialogue Partners*

Professor Zhao Huasheng, director of the Center for SCO Studies at Fudan University, points out that “the relationship with the United States is the most sensitive and difficult relationship of the SCO.” According to Zhao, there was a lack of a consensus among SCO member states not so much on the form that relations with the United States should take but on the question of whether to

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<sup>27</sup> “Shanghai Forum Calls for Deadlines for US Bases in Central Asia,” *ITAR-TASS*, July 5, 2005.

<sup>28</sup> “Iran Is a Leader in Terror, Rumsfeld Tells Defense Group,” *New York Times*, June 4, 2006.

build a cooperative relationship with the United States at all.<sup>29</sup> But the question of how to deal with the United States is an issue that the SCO cannot avoid. If the current state of affairs is allowed to continue, and the organization's member states and observer states fail to develop a shared vision of the kind of relationship they want with the United States, it is possible that the foundations of SCO cooperation will become subject to external influence and therefore weakened.

So how does China view the relationship between the SCO and the United States? To begin from the conclusion: It appears that China envisages building with the United States a relationship of cooperation on specific issues, based on the SCO dialogue partners regulations ratified in August 2008. The annual report on SCO development in 2009, edited by the Institute for Eastern European, Russian, and Central Asian Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, suggested that consideration be given to building a mechanism for dialogue between the SCO and the United States, putting forward concrete proposals for strengthening cooperation with NATO in "certain well-defined areas, such as border region security and narcotics control" and that "consideration might also be given to using contact groups between the SCO and Afghanistan to develop dialogue and cooperation with the United States in the field of counter-terrorism."<sup>30</sup>

The SCO first revealed concrete policies relating to Afghanistan shortly after 9/11. At an extraordinary foreign ministers meeting held in Beijing in January 2002, a joint statement was issued that revealed the general trend of SCO views and policies on Afghanis-

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<sup>29</sup> Zhao Huasheng, "Dui shanghai hezuo zuzhi fazhan qianjing de jidian kanfa (views on the outlook for SCO development)," *Guoji wenti yanjiu* (international studies), No. 3 (2006), p.27.

<sup>30</sup> Li Shuyin, "Shanghai hezuo zuzhi de anquan hezuo," p. 88.

tan.<sup>31</sup> The statement “welcomed” the downfall of the Taliban and said that regional and sub-regional organizations had an indispensable role to play in delivering a body blow to international terrorist networks based in Afghanistan. The SCO promised to pass measures to strengthen its counter-terrorist capabilities, and vowed to “carry out constructive dialogue and cooperation with the temporary Afghan government and the future power structure in Afghanistan.” But the emphasis of the declaration was a clarification of the SCO’s principled stance in terms of the reaction of the international community, including such issues as the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Afghanistan, its unity as a state, and the need for the international community to respect the principle of nonintervention in internal affairs. On security matters, the SCO agreed that the United Nations should take the initiative in leading the activities of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the rebuilding process in Afghanistan.

In the discussions on Afghanistan at the 60th session of the General Assembly of the United Nations in November 2005, China’s deputy permanent representative to the UN Zhang Yishan spoke on behalf of the SCO, calling on the international community to unite in pushing forward the peace-building process in Afghanistan.<sup>32</sup> During the discussions, Zhang did not merely confirm the SCO’s position in principle in terms of the response of the international community, but also suggested concrete areas for cooperation. He stressed the importance to stability of how the community

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<sup>31</sup> “Shanghai hezuo zuzhi waijiao buzhang fei lixing huiyi lianhe shengming (joint statement of the SCO foreign ministers’ meeting),” (January 2002), *Waijiaobu onyasi ed., Shunying shidai chaoliu, hongyang ‘Shanghai jingshen’* (go with the time, aggrandize the ‘shanghai spirit’), (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 2002), pp. 188-192.

<sup>32</sup> “Rebuilding War-torn Afghanistan, Achieving Peaceful Settlement of Aalestinian Question Focus of General Assembly Debates,” GA/10426, November 28, 2005.

dealt with the production and spread throughout the region of the narcotics that provided the bulk of the Taliban's funds, and made clear the SCO's intention to work with the international community to strengthen measures dealing with the narcotics issue and to carry out humanitarian aid. Concrete SCO involvement in Afghanistan began that month with the establishment of an SCO-Afghanistan contact group in same month. Although the contact group was an ad hoc organization, SCO aid to Afghanistan was carried out after the group deliberated and reached a consensus.<sup>33</sup> The SCO increased its involvement in Afghanistan in 2008. Additionally, in light of the deteriorating security situation in that country, a joint statement issued at a SCO leaders' summit in August 2008 recognized that the ISAF must cooperate with the Afghanistan government, neighboring countries, and other concerned nations, making it a priority to deal decisively with the problems of narcotics production and smuggling in Afghanistan; and called for a United Nations Security Council debate on the subject. As for the SCO itself, it declared its intention to cooperate closely with the relevant countries and regional organizations to develop a wide-ranging partnership network to respond to the threats of terrorism and narcotics. As a concrete step toward this end, a decision was taken at the leadership summit to strengthen the functions of the contact group and to hold a special conference on Afghanistan to discuss the issue of jointly fighting terrorism, drug trafficking and organized crime.<sup>34</sup>

The SCO's calls for a wide-ranging partnership network on the Afghan problem were reflected in improvements made to bolster the legal foundations. At the SCO leaders' summit in August 2008, the "Regulations on the Status of Dialogue Partner" were ratified,

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<sup>33</sup> S/PV.6257, January 13, 2010, p. 21

<sup>34</sup> "Shanghai hexuo zuzhi chengyuanguo yuanshou dushangbie yuanyan (Dushanbe declaration among the heads of state of the SCO)," *Renmin ribao*, August 28, 2008.

with the purpose of creating conditions conducive to the development of mutually beneficial relations with concerned states or organizations around the world.<sup>35</sup> These regulations stipulate that “a state or an organization who wishes to obtain the status of partner forwards a letter addressed to the SCO secretary general which contains a request to be granted such status and is signed by the minister of foreign affairs or the head of the executive body of an organization” and that “a decision to grant the status of partner is taken by the council of heads of member states on the recommendation of the council of foreign ministers.” The scope of such cooperation is outlined in a memorandum. For example, when Belarus was accepted as the organization’s first dialogue partner in April 2010, the specified areas of cooperation were the economy, transport, distribution, finance, and the fight against terrorism and narcotics.<sup>36</sup> In order to carry forward cooperation within these areas, the dialogue partner receives the right to take part in ministerial level meetings established under the Heads of Government Council. Additionally, the option exists to establish working groups and high-level committees in the relevant areas of cooperation. In this context, professor Yu Jianhua, director of the Institute of Eurasian Studies at the SASS, has proposed establishing an international cooperation mechanism to respond to the Afghanistan problem, with Afghanistan, the United States, and NATO participating as dialogue partners of the SCO.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> “Regulations on the Status of Dialogue Partners of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation,” August 28, 2008. Available at <http://www.sectsc.org/EN/show.asp?id=64> (accessed December 6, 2010).

<sup>36</sup> “Sergei Martynov: Belarus Becomes SCO’s First Country-Partner,” *BelTA* (Belarusian Telegraph Agency), April 28, 2010.

<sup>37</sup> Yu Jianhua, “Afuhan wenti yu shanghai hezuo zuzhi (Afghanistan issue and the SCO),” Chen Peiyao and Xia Liping eds., *Guoji zhanlue zongheng* (international strategic review), No. 5, (Beijing: Shishi chuanshe, 2009), p. 260.

In late March 2009, the SCO held a special conference on Afghanistan in Moscow. In addition to SCO member states and observers, some 20 countries and international organizations were invited, among them Afghanistan, the United States, the United Nations, and the CSTO. Noting the participation of US Deputy Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs Patrick Moon, Yu claimed that “dialogue between the United States and the SCO has begun,” stressing the significance of the conference from the perspective of building a cooperative relationship between the SCO and the United States.<sup>38</sup> The United States did not send an especially high level representative to the conference. Nevertheless, if there are plans to grant the United States dialogue partner status on the issue of Afghanistan in the future, it is possible not only that the United States will participate in the dialogue framework of the SCO as it exists today, but that, with the consent of the United States and the SCO member states, ministerial-level discussions within a new, expanded framework (SCO+USA) might one day be possible.

## CONCLUSION

In previous studies and Chinese diplomatic pronouncements, Chinese priorities for regional security have frequently been described as existing in opposition to the development of US-led alliance strategies. Even in regional efforts such as ASEAN+3 and SCO, where China stressed in its diplomatic announcements the non-antagonistic and open nature of regional cooperation, not enough attention has been given to the underlying logic and trends in policy that have made this possible.

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<sup>38</sup> Yu Jianhua and Dai Yichen, “Feichuantong anquan quyue zhili yu shanghai hezuo zuzhi (on regional governance of non-traditional security and the SCO),” *Shehui kexue*, No. 7 (2009), p. 26.

By examining the example of the SCO, this paper has shown how China—in the process of establishing a system of dialogue partners within the SCO—has pushed forward a logical strategy and institutional design that makes it possible to construct a system that allows for a certain level of external relations between the regional security organization in which China plays a leading role and the alliances (NATO, for example) and the US-led coalition. Within China, there is an awareness of the need to build stable international relations not just with the United States but with other major states and international organizations such as Japan, NATO, and the EU.<sup>39</sup> Crucial to the viability of such future relationships will be the dialogue partner and the possibility that China can continue to push ahead with developing the SCO's external relations so that it is capable of responding both bilaterally and multilaterally to issues. In the security field, the likeliest scenario is an attempt, initially, to establish policy dialogue with the United States and NATO in Afghanistan, concentrating especially on non-traditional security issues such as responding to terrorism and drugs smuggling.

From the Chinese perspective, one important premise of building international relations within regional organizations such as the SCO is to secure a leading role for the United Nations. In this sense, the extent to which China can see a leading role for the United Nations within the development of US alliance strategy will be a decisive factor in determining the viability and extent of any policy dialogue between the SCO and other major states and international organizations. But this is not something that will be decided by China alone. With Mongolia, Pakistan, Iran, and India now

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<sup>39</sup> Pan Guang, “Shanghe jiang jian duihua huoban jizhi (SCO creates mechanism of dialogue partners),” *Jiefang ribao* (liberation daily), August 27, 2008.

enjoying the status of observers of the SCO, the process by which the SCO decides its relationships with the United States and the rest of the world will inevitably become more multi-polar. When it comes to these relationships, China will have to get used to balancing competing interests within the SCO.



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